

## Barth Society program set for AAR/SBL meetings in Denver, November 16-17

November 16-17 will see two sessions sponsored by the Karl Barth Society of North America in conjunction with the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in Denver. The sessions will be devoted to two of Barth's early exegetical works under the theme of "Theological Exegesis." As in previous years, the first session will be on Friday afternoon with a second session on Saturday morning.

### INVITATION TO MEMBERSHIP IN THE KARL BARTH SOCIETY

All who are interested are invited to join the Karl Barth Society of North America.

To become a member of the Barth Society, send your name, address, and annual dues of \$15.00 (\$10.00 for students) to:

Professor Russell Palmer  
Dept. of Philosophy and Religion  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Omaha, NE 68182-0265

Checks (drawn on a U. S. bank) should be made payable to "Karl Barth Society."

*AN APOLOGY—As a result of the editor's illness, this issue of the Newsletter is late in appearing. We regret the inconvenience this delay has caused. - RWP*

## "JUSTIFICATION IN CHRIST" TO BE THEME OF SUMMER CONFERENCE

Wayne Stumme of the Institute for Mission in the U.S.A. of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reports that he is organizing another theological conference for the summer of 2002. The theme will be: *"The Gospel of Justification in Christ—Where Does the Church Stand Today?"* It is scheduled for July 22-24 at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Dr. Stumme commented that although this will not be a straightforward "Barth conference" such as he has often arranged in the past, speakers will include a number of Barthian scholars and theologians influenced by him. "I think that this great Reformation emphasis deserves attention today, and I believe that the presenters will help us deal with various

The Friday session will be held from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. in the Gray's Peak Room of the Hyatt Regency Hotel. The topic will be **Theological Exegesis: Karl Barth's *Resurrection of the Dead***. The presenter will be A. Katherine Grieb (Virginia Theological Seminary) and the respondent will be David Fergusson (Edinburgh University).

*The Resurrection of the Dead*, for any who may not be familiar with it, is Barth's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15, published in 1924. The exposition of "the Resurrection Chapter" is preceded by an account of "The Trend of 1 Corinthians 1-14." The explanation of chapter 15 is divided into four sections: "The Resurrection Gospel as the Foundation of the Church" (vv.1-11), "The Resurrection as the Meaning of Faith" (vv.12-34), "The Resurrection as Truth" (vv.35-49), and "The Resurrection as Reality" (vv.50-58).

The Saturday session will meet from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. in Room C109 of the Colorado Convention Center. The topic will be **Theological Exegesis: Karl Barth's *Philippians Commentary***. Presenters will be Francis Watson (Aberdeen University) and Bruce McCormack (Princeton Theological Seminary). Gordon Fee (Regent College, Vancouver) will be the respondent.

*The Epistle to the Philippians* contains Barth's lectures at Münster in the winter semester of 1926-27.

contemporary issues related to the theme," he declared.

Next summer's line-up of speakers and topics is as follows:

- "The Reformation Understanding: Luther and Calvin, Convergence and Divergence" by Gabriel Fackre (emeritus, Andover Newton Theological School);
- "Reconciliation and Justification in the Church Dogmatics of Karl Barth—A Contemporary Reformation Perspective" by George Hunsinger (Princeton Theological Seminary); [continued on page 2]

- “Justification in Christ and the Response of the Religions” by Paul Martinson (Luther Seminary);
- “The Doctrine of Justification in Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue and Agreement,” by Joseph A. Di Noia, O.P. (Dominican House of Studies, Washington) and Michael Root (Trinity Lutheran Seminary);
- “Preaching Justification and Practicing *Seelsorge*—The Pastoral Dimensions of the Doctrine of Justification” by Katherine Sonderegger (Middlebury College);
- “God’s Justification of Sinners and the Human Struggle for Justice—The Social Consequences of the Doctrine of Justification” by Gary Dorrien (Kalamazoo College);
- “Justification in Christ and the Unity of the Church—The Ecclesial Necessity of the Doctrine of Justification” by Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J. (Fordham) and Gerhard Forde (emeritus, Luther Seminary).

Preachers for the conference will be Michael Tassler (Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas, Virginia) and Caroline Simon (Hope College).

While the primary audience for these conferences over the years has been Lutheran pastors, members of the Barth Society have also attended and benefited from them.

Those interested in further information may contact Dr. Stumme at 198 Sixth Street East, #604, St. Paul MN 55101-2992. Telephone 651-291-7550. His e-mail address is: [wcstumme@aol.com](mailto:wcstumme@aol.com)

## DAVID DEMSON HONORED UPON HIS RETIREMENT

David E. Demson, General Secretary of the Karl Barth Society of North America, retired last spring as Professor of Systematic Theology at Emmanuel College in the Toronto School of Theology, where he had taught since 1964. He has served the KBSNA as General Secretary since its inception in 1972.

His retirement was marked by the publication of a special issue of the *Toronto Journal of Theology* (Spring 2001), edited by Philip G. Ziegler, devoted to essays in his honor.

In his “*Laudatio*: David E. Demson” Phil Ziegler pays tribute to David’s “unflagging passion for that understanding which Christian faith rightly seeks.” He writes: “For many of us who encountered David in both lecture hall and seminar room over the years, it was precisely this impassioned *quaerens* which in us first kindled, and then repeatedly re-kindled, an ardour for the *ratio* of the gospel of God.”

In addition to the opening *Laudatio*, twelve essays were contributed by Emil Fackenheim, Eberhard Jüngel, John Webster, Katherine Sonderegger, Martin Rumschidt, George Hunsinger, and a number of others.

If readers of the Newsletter will pardon a personal comment from the editor, I would like to quote from my letter to David on the occasion of a reception in honor of his retirement:

“As General Secretary of the Karl Barth Society of North America, you have provided vital leadership in the field of Barth studies for many years. Throughout the years I have known you—beginning with the first KBSNA conference in the early 1970s and especially in the last dozen years or so—I have been impressed with your grasp of theological issues and the depth of your insight, and I have come to rely on your wisdom. Your written work and oral presentations have never failed to enlighten me, and I have always enjoyed and been stimulated by our conversations. It has been an honor and a joy to be your friend and colleague. I have always admired your intimate knowledge of Barth’s theology (and Christian theology generally), your commitment to the gospel, your discernment, your capacity for articulate expression, and your zest for theological combat! Not to mention that no one can match you when it comes to giving a look of disdain to an errant Boston policeman! [*The latter refers to a confrontation between David and a police officer who questioned his attempt to guide a car driven by Bill Klempa out of a traffic snarl caused by the “Big Dig” during the 1999 AAR meeting in Boston.*]

“I trust that your retirement from Emmanuel College will not mark the end of your theological activity. While you should feel free to enjoy your retirement, I hope that your contributions through lecturing, writing, and mentoring will continue for years to come.”

## DISRUPTIVE GRACE: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth

By George Hunsinger. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

*Reviewed by Russell W. Palmer*

George Hunsinger, McCord Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, previously served as Director of the Center for Barth Studies. This collection of 15 essays by one of our premier Barth scholars is an important addition to the Barthian literature. Gathered here are a number of papers presented at conferences sponsored by the Karl Barth Society and on other occasions. Several have appeared in various journals, but a few were previously unpublished. For one who heard the original presentations of several of these, having them available in book form is a source of considerable satisfaction.



The collection is divided into three parts, devoted respectively to political, doctrinal, and ecumenical theology.

Hunsinger points to what it is about Barth's thought that makes him so difficult to classify: "Thoroughly modern, he has rejected modernism in theology. Deeply traditional, he has left no stone of tradition unturned..." (1). Barth's attempt to think through doctrines from a trinitarian and incarnational standpoint sometimes leads to revisions of received tradition that are astonishing—e.g. his doctrine of election (10). This combination of tradition and innovation has challenged Barth's critics, leading to repeated misunderstandings and misrepresentations. As Hunsinger observes, "It will be a great day when Barth is at least rejected for positions that he actually held instead of for positions that he didn't take" (9).

The essay on "The Politics of the Nonviolent God: Reflections on René Girard and Karl Barth" is a stimulating attempt to retrieve some of the insights of the contemporary cultural anthropologist and literary critic within a Christian theological context. For Girard, religion is basically sacrifice, of which nonviolence is the opposite; when Christ submits to violence, he overcomes the basis of all religion. Hunsinger argues that Christ is not just an innocent victim of injustice. With help from Hans Urs von Balthasar's reflections on five main features of atonement in the New Testament and T. F. Torrance's development of the threefold office of Christ as it relates to the atonement, he shows how the saving significance of Christ is richer and deeper than in Girard's thought. The rest of the essay highlights Barth's teaching on enemy-love and nonviolence.

Another highlight is "Karl Barth and Liberation Theology," a 1983 article in which Hunsinger explores both the political solidarity between Barth and the liberationists and the theological distance between them. He identifies the "controlling passion" of Barth's theology as giving unqualified precedence to the Word of God, while that of liberation theology is, of course, to bring liberation to the oppressed (48). "Each sees things in Scripture which the other misses," yet their presentations "not only partially overlap, but may finally be mutually corrective" (51). He identifies the issue between them as two different understandings of the relationship between love for God and love for the neighbor, in which "Barth is right in principle whereas the liberationists are right in practice" (55). "What Barth has to offer liberation theology," Hunsinger suggests, "is a way of grounding and anchoring the admittedly necessary functional criteria in certain prior, determinative, and more fundamental theological criteria"—specifically, "how a theology of liberation might be anchored more securely in a theology of grace" (57). I found this a very helpful analysis.

Also worth highlighting in Part I under the heading of Political Theology are two essays that powerfully

relate the concerns of the Barmen Declaration to the American situation in the 1980s: "Barth, Barmen, and the Confessing Church Today" (1984) and "Where the Battle Rages: Confessing Christ in America Today" (1987). One can only wish for this kind of trenchant theological and political analysis to be applied to the current situation.

Later, responding to John Howard Yoder's claim that Barth reflects a "sectarian" view of church and society, Hunsinger points to Barth's emphasis on the solidarity that the church shares with the world in both sin and grace: "Barth found what the church had in common with the world to be always more fundamental than any polarity which might arise on the basis of the church's human response to Jesus Christ" (123). After conceding the element of truth in Yoder's interpretation, Hunsinger points out that "it is always a risky business to isolate one line of thought in Barth...without watching for the qualification which he derives from a consideration of its opposite" (128).

In Part II, Doctrinal Theology, my favorite is "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character" (the title is a parody of *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* by Charles Waldrop), where Hunsinger establishes that Barth's Christology is neither Alexandrian nor Antiochene but fully Chalcedonian. This essay contains so many well-stated clarifications of important points in Chalcedonian Christology as well as in Barth's thought that it is difficult to select only a few.

What I found particularly helpful was the explanation of Barth's strategy of juxtaposition. "Barth is probably the first theologian in the history of Christian doctrine who alternates back and forth, deliberately, between an 'Alexandrian' and an 'Antiochian' idiom" (135). The reason for such an alternation is that both concerns are valid, but we are simply unable to hear both at the same time. Whatever this juxtaposition may sacrifice in systematic coherence is made up for in faithfulness to the subject matter. "The point of Christology, Barth believed, is to comprehend the incomprehensibility of the incarnation precisely in its incomprehensibility" rather than trying to force it into some more easily understood scheme of thought (135).

Hunsinger also calls attention to the following innovations: Barth "actualized the traditional conception of the incarnation," "he personalized the saving significance of Christ's death," and "he contemporized the consequences of Christ's resurrection" (140). The result is a Christology that is "resoundingly traditional" and "brilliantly innovative" at the same time (141).

Another fine essay in this section is "The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit." Hunsinger lays out Barth's view of the saving work of the Holy Spirit as trinitarian in ground, christocentric in focus, miraculous in operation,



communal in context, eschatological in form, diversified in application, and universal in scope. These pages are filled with solid exposition of Barth's teaching and acute comments on key interpretative issues.

In beginning his discussion of this theme, Hunsinger addresses one of the most common misunderstandings of Barth's theology—that his stress on revelation leads to a theology that is predominantly or exclusively cognitive. "Since Barth thought reconciliation never occurred without revelation, nor revelation without reconciliation, no critique which presupposes their separation, or fails to see their connection, could possibly be of much interest..." (150). He asserts that "knowledge of God, in Barth's theology, is essentially a form of *koinonia*" (170).

Also of interest is a comment about Robert Jenson's criticism of Barth's pneumatology: "Jenson requires a supplemental saving work of the Spirit, since he explicitly denies what Barth takes to be the very heart of the New Testament, namely, that 'Christ fully accomplished our salvation at Golgotha...' Most of Jenson's censure of Barth's pneumatology can be traced back to this fundamental disagreement" (162).

An illuminating discussion of the idea of eternity in relation to the Trinity is "*Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth's Conception of Eternity*." After summarizing the traditional view of the divine eternity as an "eternal now" and the alternative of a modern "processional" view, Hunsinger notes that "Karl Barth's conception of eternity does not fit neatly into either of these standard views. His conception overlaps elements of each while transcending both." Hunsinger's attempt to relate eternity to the Trinity incorporates a number of insights on trinitarian doctrine that are very worthwhile. (Incidentally, a helpful footnote on p.191 explains why Barth cannot be called a modalist, despite his use of the term "modes of being" for the three "persons" of the Trinity.)

The essay "Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth's Hermeneutical Realism" considers how text and referent are related and makes some very helpful distinctions. It is good to see Barth's approach clearly differentiated from both modern liberal and fundamentalist ways of reading Scripture.

A study of four views of "Hellfire and Damnation" (the Augustinian view of eternal punishment, Origen's belief in universal salvation and a modern variant by J. A. T. Robinson, annihilationism as advocated by evangelicals like John R. W. Stott, and "reverent agnosticism") rounds out this section of the volume. Hunsinger includes Barth under the last heading instead of universalism, because "Barth deliberately leaves the question open, though not in a neutral fashion, but with a strong tilt toward universal hope" (243). Hunsinger commends the universalist tradition for having "focused concretely on the cross of Christ as the demonstration of God's love for the entire world" and for having "refused to allow the important

universalist passages in the New Testament to be so thoroughly marginalized" as they have been by the dominant theological tradition.

Part III, Ecumenical Theology, contains some interesting analyses. "Baptized into Christ's Death: Karl Barth and the Future of Roman Catholic theology" ventures into a dispute between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner, bringing out some excellent points on the relation between the person and work of Christ.

"What Karl Barth Learned from Martin Luther" (dedicated to Wayne Stumme) is a gem. Beginning with the observation that "No theologian receives a longer entry in the index volume to Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* than Martin Luther" (279), Hunsinger suggests two ways of figuring out whether Luther actually influenced Barth. One is "if an idea can be found in both theologians that has no real precedent before Luther," and the other is "if Barth has followed Luther at junctures where he faced a real choice between Luther and Calvin" (282). The results are impressive.

"Truth as Self-Involving" offers a corrective to the tendency to see George Lindbeck's position in *The Nature of Doctrine* as essentially Barthian (David Tracy); it turns out that Lindbeck is actually closer to Aquinas than to Barth.

"What Can Evangelicals and Postliberals Learn from Each Other?" analyzes a debate between the late Hans Frei and the conservative evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry. Frei's position is clarified and the reader is helped to see how "modernistic" the conservative Henry's approach really is.

The book closes with a "Meditation on the Blood of Christ."

I have now read this book three times. It has been of enormous help to me in clarifying many important issues. One must respect the rigor, the precision, and the sheer mastery of the theological material that are characteristic of George Hunsinger's work—not to mention his (thoroughly Barthian) love of the subject matter of Christian theology. The book is a rich feast for those who share his commitments.

Why the title *Disruptive Grace*? Hunsinger believes that "grace that is not disruptive is not grace" (16). It would be a mistake to see grace as merely comforting and not also unsettling. Hunsinger sounds the Barthian note that the grace of God is not at our disposal or under our control.

This work makes a fine companion to Hunsinger's outstanding guide *How to Read Karl Barth* (Oxford, 1991). The recent appearance of this collection in paperback should enhance its usefulness.

Address communications for the Newsletter to the editor:  
Russell W. Palmer, University of Nebraska at Omaha,  
Omaha NE 68182-0265; (402) 554-3066; e-mail address:  
[russellpalmer@home.com](mailto:russellpalmer@home.com)